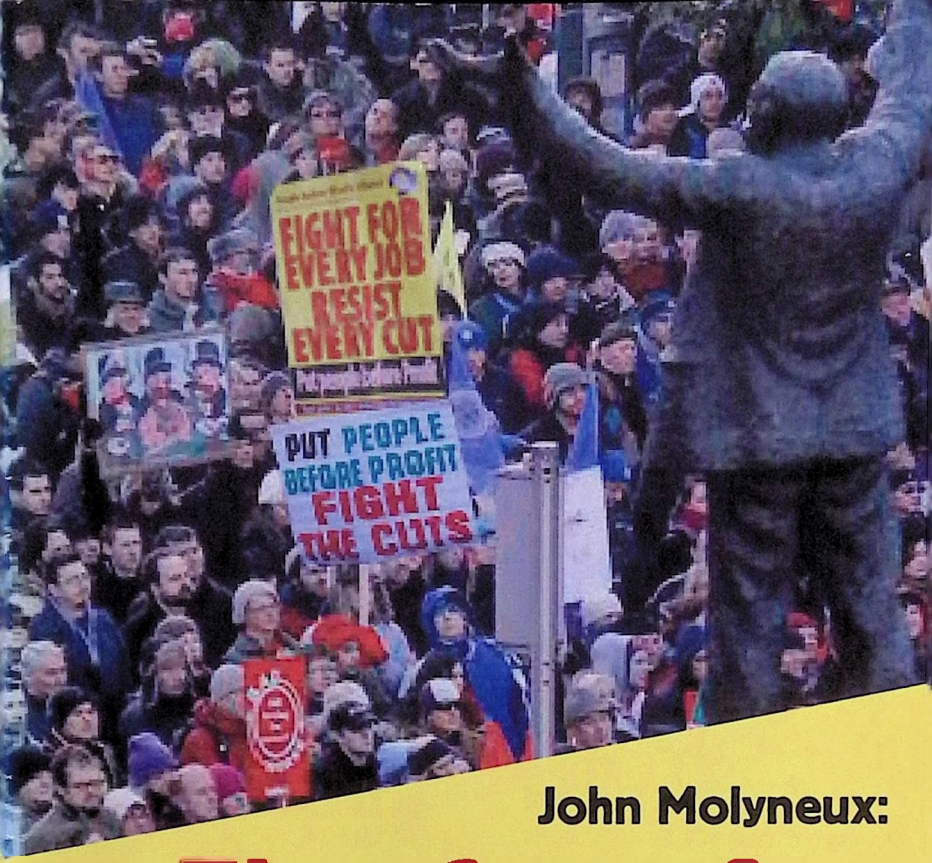

John Molyneux:

The Case for Socialism in Ireland

A *Socialist Workers Party* pamphlet

John Molyneux is a socialist activist in Dublin, a member of the Socialist Workers Party and the author of a number of books including The Point is To Change It! An Introduction to Marxist Philosophy (2012) and Will the Revolution be Televised? (2011).

John can be contacted at john@molyneux8652.freeserve.co.uk

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Chapter 1. The mess we are in

One thing everyone knows and everyone is agreed on – right, left and centre – is that Ireland is in a huge mess. In December 2012 we had our sixth vicious austerity budget in a row, inflicting massive hardship on our people, and there is no end in sight.

Just how bad things are is shown by the way 'deal' on the promissory note which stretches out repayment of the debt to 2053, without securing the reduction of one cent of it, is hailed by the government and much of the media as a triumph. Imagine you met an acquaintance in the street whose response to your 'How's it going?' was, 'Grand! I had a bit of a debt problem, but I've done a deal with the loan sharks and they've agreed to collect it off my kids, and the grandchildren.' *.

Another take on the situation is to compare what's happened to two people. The first is, Joe Stynes, 35, from Ballyfermot in Dublin. Joe is not some particularly tragic case, just an ordinary working class guy struggling to survive.

When Joe left school in 1995 he got an apprenticeship as a welder and worked making doors, fire escapes etc in Ballyfermot while studying at the Tech in Bolton St. in the evening. In 1998, aged 21, he went to London where he worked as a skilled welder at Canary Wharf, Heathrow, the Millennium Dome and so on. Back in Ireland he has not been able to get a proper job since 2008.

In 2009 his family bought him a flight to Florida to stay with his brother there in the hope of finding work, but he had no luck. In desperation he even contemplated joining the French Foreign Legion, but a ripped hamstring put paid to that. Still out of work in September 2011 he went back to college on a preliminary engineering course and is now doing a 4 year Degree in Mechanical Engineering at Tallaght Institute.

This means he has to live at home with his recently widowed mother and survive on €188 a week for the foreseeable future. Even when he graduates in 2016, Joe does not think he'll be able to get work in Ireland.

*And it now looks likely, as The Independent reports, 'that all benefit of securing the promissory-note deal in 2013 will be lost in order to repay senior bondholders, who were guaranteed by the State'

But then there is Brian Goggin,60. Goggin was Chief Executive Officer of Bank of Ireland from 2005 to 2009 at salary which varied from €1.5 million to €3 million per year. When he retired from the bank at the early age of 56 he claimed in a public interview that his salary in the previous year had been cut to 'under €2 million'. However he also received a pension of €650,000 for life!. In 2008 Goggin played an important role in persuading the government to issue the now infamous bank guarantee.

So surely Brian, like Joe has had difficulty finding work recently? Not a bit of it. As The Independent reported in 2011

Brian Goggin - the former chief executive who racked up billions of euros of bum property loans - has joined up with €42bn private equity giant Apollo Management to target distressed financial assets and other investments... Apollo, which was set up by banker Leon Black - one of the richest men on Wall St. - has been active in buying distressed financial companies across Europe in recent months.

In other words, a skilled worker who is able and keen to, quite literally, help rebuild the economy is out of work, while a banker who is already extremely wealthy and who played a big part in wrecking the country, is paid more millions to continue his financial gambling and speculation. This is Ireland today.

The economic crisis

During the years of the Celtic Tiger, roughly 1995– 2008 the Irish economy grew on average at 7% per year. Not every one benefited from the Celtic Tiger expansion – some, the poorest in society, were left badly behind – and the benefits were very unevenly distributed. The rich and the middle classes did much better than the majority of working people but, overall, for most people, things got a bit better.

Then, suddenly, in 2007/2008 it all fell apart. First property prices, which had risen dramatically during the Tiger years, fell no less dramatically. This led to a massive crisis in the banks. During the boom Ireland's banks leant recklessly to property developers who, as property prices collapsed, were unable to pay back these loans. This left the banks with immense bad debts which were never going to be repaid.

On September 30 2008, the Fianna Fail/Green government announced that it would guarantee all the deposits and debts of Ireland's six main

banks (Anglo, AIB, Bank of Ireland etc) for two years. At a stroke the government made the bankers' debts our debts.

It soon turned out that the banks owed even more – an enormous amount more - than they had let on and the bank guarantee was bankrupting the state. In November 2010 the government sought and obtained a bail-out of €85 billion from the ECB and the IMF which would be repaid by the Irish people in the coming years on very tough terms.

Meanwhile, since 2008, the economy had gone into recession. So people were having to pay back the debts incurred by the banks in a situation of severe economic decline when there was less money in most people's pockets

What this economic catastrophe has meant in human terms can be summed up in four dreadful facts.

• *FACT ONE:* there are no jobs. Unemployment has risen to 15% with over 450,000 on the live register. The young have been particularly hard hit with youth unemployment standing at over 30% - almost 1 in 3 17-24 year olds are out of work. Without mass emigration it would be much worse.

• *FACT TWO:* poverty is increasing. The government's own Survey on Income and Living Conditions records that, by 2010, 22.5% - nearly a quarter of the Irish population – were suffering serious material deprivation. That compares to 12% in 2008 and is the highest figure the survey has ever recorded.. By now it is much worse.The Irish League of Credit Unions revealed that 1.6 million have less than €50 a month left after essential bills and it was reported in The Irish Times that 1 in 5 children are now going to school hungry

• *FACT THREE:* emigration. Because there are no jobs, because there is more poverty, people are leaving the country at a rate of over 3000 a month – the highest figure since the Famine.

• *FACT FOUR:* suicide. The number of recorded suicides in the Republic increased by 7% in 2011..525 suicides were registered in 2011. International research shows that for every 1% increase in unemployment there is a 0.78% increase in the rate of suicide

Dan Neville TD, President of the Irish Association of Suicidology, said the figure 'reflected the neglect of suicide prevention for decades, and the

economic recession, which impacts on the levels of depression, anxiety and despair'.

It's not just the economy

The terrible state of the Irish economy is the most obvious problem we face but by no means the only one. There are also deep seated political and social problems

Corruption has been rampant in Irish politics for a generation or more. You have only to list the names – Charlie Haughey, Bertie Ahern, Michael Lowry, Jackie Healy Rae – and the businessmen they were linked to: Ben Dunne, Sean Dunne, Seanie Fitzpatrick, Denis O'Brien and so on – to get the picture; decades of dirty dealings in the Galway Tent, on the golf courses and elsewhere. Minister of Health, James O'Reilly, who made a point of locating Primary Health Care Centres in his constituency (when his constituency failed to meet the laid down criteria) is ensuring that the tradition of stroke politics remains alive and well.

As a result there is tremendous, and well justified cynicism towards politicians among a lot of working people. This is increased by the way parties in opposition say one thing and do the exact opposite the moment they get into power.

The current behaviour of the Eamon Gilmore and the Labour Party is the main example of this. In opposition Labour pledged to protect working people from the cuts. In office they have implemented massive cuts. In opposition Gilmore said 'Its Frankfurt's way or Labour's way'. In power it has been Frankfurt's way all the way! In opposition Gilmore explicitly promised that Labour would not be part of a government that would cut child benefit. In power they just cut child benefit by €10 per week (and by €18 for the third child and €20 for the fourth!). In opposition Ruari Quinn signed a written pledge not to raise student fees and in power ...? Well you can guess.

If Labour is the extreme example of this political double dealing, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail are all also guilty – not to mention the late and unlamented Greens in the last coalition government. And the same could be said of Sinn Fein, who say they are against cuts in the South but actually implement Tory cuts in the North.

Cynicism is also fed by the failure of the trade union leaders to stand up

for their members or working people generally. A major cause of this failure is the fact that many of the union leaders, like Jack O'Connor of SIPTU and David Beggs of ICTU, are in league with Labour and therefore in league with the government, as well as receiving very high salaries.

On February 9 these union leaders, under pressure from their rank-and-file, called mass demonstrations for the lifting of the debt burden in towns across Ireland. The turnout of working people was generally good but the rallies were organised in such a way – with comedians and loud music at the end – as to demobilise the crowd and avoid giving any commitment to ongoing resistance.

Another big problem is the role of the Catholic Church. The grip of the Church on Irish society has clearly loosened since the days of Archbishop McQuaid but it is still significant. This institution which presided over and covered up decades of brutal physical and sexual abuse of children, ranging from rape at one extreme to absolutely routine caning, beating and humiliation at the other, and which managed, with the collusion of the State, the appalling slavery of the Magdalene Laundries for more than four decades (the last one didn't close till 1996) still has a leading role in the state, and still has massive influence in schools and hospitals.

Thus Archbishop Diarmuid Martin is patron of about 470 primary schools in Ireland and 93% of all primary schools in the Archdiocese of Dublin. At the same time the Mater Hospital in Dublin is still run by the Sisters of Mercy with the result that as recently as 2005 (!) the hospital deferred trials of a lung cancer medication because female patients in the trial would be required to practice contraception contrary to Roman Catholic teaching.

Crucially, at the time of writing, the Church is still using its influence to try to block legislation for the X case, which the government has been under order from the European Court of Human Rights to introduce for more than 20 years. Despite the tragic death of Savita Hallopanarvar in Galway, the four Archbishops of Ireland were outside the Dail orchestrating a protest against legislation on December 4, 2012, followed by a massively funded at anti- choice rally in January. And this power at the top of Irish society is quite out of proportion to the actual role of the Church among ordinary people.

Moreover, the economic disaster, the rotten politicians and the reactionary Church hierarchy all feed into each other. The result is a thorough going social crisis – a big mess.

It's not just in the South

Northern Ireland has never been a 'normal' society. When it was established in 1921 its very boundaries were determined by the need to create as large an area as possible while retaining a built in Loyalist majority. It then continued for the next fifty years as a sectarian state based on blatant discrimination against the Nationalist minority.

The Good Friday Agreement, followed by the Peace Process, was supposed to put an end to all this, and it is certainly a good thing that working people are not killing each other and that some of the old discrimination has been ended, but sectarianism has not gone away.

On the contrary sectarianism was built into the whole way the Peace Process was organized .At Stormont, where all Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) have to declare themselves Unionist, Nationalist or Other, the First Minister is always from the largest Unionist or Nationalist party, the Deputy First Minister from the largest party on the "other side". Housing remains highly segregated and every new school, health or community centre is seen as going to one 'community' or the other.

This has a poisonous effect as sectarianism trickles down towards the street, and is intensified by the way both the DUP and Sinn Fein are involved in inflicting austerity, cuts and misery on both Protestant and Catholic workers. In Belfast the number of so-called Peace Walls has doubled since the Good Friday agreement and in recent years there has been a marked increase in sectarian physical attacks. At the same time poverty remains disproportionately concentrated in Catholic areas.

In December 2012 and January of this year sectarianism burst into the open with the Loyalist 'flag riots'. It has to be said that a society in which a section of working people are rioting over the insufficient flying of the Union Flag by their rulers when the real owners of that flag, the British ruling class, are cutting them to the bone, is a deeply distorted society.

The ongoing power of religious bigotry, based on the sectarianism, means that Northern Ireland shares with the Republic the distinction of being backward when it comes to a woman's right to choose.

In reality, both North and South we have dysfunctional states failing to

represent either the wishes or the interests of their people.

It's not just Ireland.

A last point: this pamphlet is focused on Ireland but it is important to remember that the economic crisis is an international crisis. It began not in Ireland but in the United States and is affecting everywhere, especially countries like Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal and also the UK and the US itself. And everywhere it is producing suffering and conflict, while at the same time the long term future of the world is threatened by climate change and governments are unwilling to do anything about it. Ireland is in a mess but it also a global mess. We will return to this later.

Chapter 2. Who is to blame?

The people most obviously responsible for the economic mess are the property developers and bankers.

During the boom years these people, driven by insatiable greed, completely lost the run of themselves. They forgot or ignored a basic fact of economics and history, namely that booms don't last forever and that bubbles always burst. They borrowed and lent like there was no tomorrow and recklessly ran up levels of debt that were completely unsustainable. By 2007 Irish banks had lent and were owed something like €100 billion – an astonishing figure for a small nation of 4.5 million people.

The politicians were also in this up to their necks. While things were going well they deliberately turned a blind eye to what the developers and bankers were up to – they called this 'light touch regulation'. Indeed as we noted in the previous chapter many of the politicians were involved in shady dealings with the bankers and developers, and benefited directly from them.

Moreover, when the Celtic Tiger first began to run out of steam in 2001-2, the Fianna Fail government quite deliberately encouraged a reckless property boom to try to keep the boom and their own gravy train going.

But only blaming the bankers, the developers and the politicians – guilty as they are – misses some important points. First, as we have seen, they are all connected. Second they all have close links with other key groups in Irish society – the top industrialists and businessmen (like Tony O'Reilly and Denis O'Brien), those who control the media (Tony O'Reilly and Denis O'Brien again), the judges, the heads of the armed forces, the gardai, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and so on.

What we are dealing with here is not just individuals but a whole class of people – the 1% as the Occupy Movement called them – Ireland's ruling class who really control what happens in the country.

These people are united by a) being rich and powerful, b) deriving their wealth, power and privileges from the labour of the mass of working people and c) being committed to an economic system, capitalism, which always puts profit before people's needs. These are the people really responsible for the mess we are in, and certainly not the mass of ordinary

working people.

Here it is important to understand that this ruling class, precisely in order to avoid their responsibility for the crisis, are always using the media to suggest that other groups are to blame, particularly 'overpaid public sector workers' 'foreigners and immigrants' and 'welfare scroungers'. These insinuations are nonsense.

The majority of public sector workers are not overpaid at all – 68% of them earn less than €50,000 a year - and Ireland ranks only ninth in the EU when it comes to spending on public services. Of course people at the top of the public sector earn a lot – 2% get over €100,000 – but so do people at the top of private industry, a great deal more in fact. J P McManus has an estimated fortune of €590 million, Dermot Desmond of €1.7 billion and Denis O'Brien of €2.7 billion (according to The Sunday Times list of 'The Richest People in Ireland'. The real division is not between public sector and private sector but between bosses in both sectors and workers in both sectors.

Similarly foreigners and immigrants are only ordinary human beings trying to survive in a difficult world, like Irish emigrants were in the bad old days and are again today. They do not lay people off, close down factories and shops, and put people on the dole. Bosses – both foreign and Irish - do that. The idea that immigrants take our jobs makes no more sense than the idea that blue-eyed or red haired people take the jobs off brown-eyed people or blondes. And blaming the unemployed and those on benefits is simply blaming the victims of the crisis, not those who caused it.

When the media and politicians target public sector workers or foreigners or single mothers or the unemployed themselves (as Labour Minister Joan Burton did when she called the dole 'a life style choice') they are just trying to divert our anger away from the ruling class and focus it on the weak and vulnerable. Working class people should reject this scapegoating and refuse to be divided.

Essentially it is the same story in the North where the British ruling class and the Unionist establishment in Northern Ireland both used sectarian bigotry to divide and paralyse the working class. Neither Protestant nor Catholic working people will really be able to advance their interests until they are able to unite against their bosses, and their bosses' government.

But if the ruling class are to blame for the dreadful crisis, so too is the

whole economic system they preside over, namely capitalism. In capitalism the vast bulk of production of goods and services is for profit not for human need. Ryanair does not fly planes because Michael O'Leary wants to provide holidays for people but to make a profit. Dunnes Stores doesn't sell food because Frank Dunne, or Ben Dunne before him, want to feed the hungry but because they want to make profits, as much profit as possible.

This ceaseless drive for profit means that when the system is booming the capitalists all fall over each other to invest and produce as much as they can and to do this they will beg, borrow and steal as much money as possible in the hope they will make even more, as Irish bankers and developers did in the Celtic Tiger. In the process they overreach themselves, lending more than they can afford, borrowing more than they can pay back and producing more than they can sell – for example houses.

Then it all goes belly-up, boom turns to bust, and because they produce only for profit the capitalists cut and run, close down their operations, sack workers and stop investing or, if they can, shift their investment to somewhere more profitable*, and if they can't pay their debts they look to the government or the International Monetary Fund to bail them out.

And the politicians, because most of them are into capitalism and the profit game up to their necks, are happy to oblige.

This has happened time and again in the history of capitalism – so often that the basic mechanism of how booms turn into recessions was analysed by Karl Marx 150 years ago – and is exactly what happened in Ireland over the last five years.

It is also what happened in America, with a crisis developing in housing (the so-called 'sub-prime mortgages') and a credit crunch when the banks started to realize they were over extended, followed by a full scale banking crisis when Lehman Brothers went bankrupt. This then tipped the global economy including the Eurozone, which was already fragile, and Ireland into recession.

Basically, capitalism as a system pushed the greedy bankers and developers into behaving as they did and then ensured that they got away with it when the house of cards collapsed.

* The ability of capitalists to shift investments round the globe at the drop of a hat is often exaggerated – frequently it is a bluff to get us to accept lower pay and worse conditions.

Chapter 3. So, who pays the price?

On this there is no doubt. We all do EXCEPT the very people who brought the country to ruin who get off more or less scot free. If you rob from a local shop or get caught fiddling the dole you end up in court and possibly in jail. If you rob the country of billions you get a golden handshake and a fat pension. John O'Donovan, a Chief Executive at the Bank of Ireland, stepped down at the end of 2011 and was awarded €735,000, while Denis Donovan, another Bank of Ireland executive, received a salary of €690,000 plus a €174,000 pension contribution. **Of course, if we didn't pay such enormous salaries we wouldn't be able to attract such outstanding individuals to run our banks!**

In contrast, ordinary people who bore no responsibility for creating the crisis have been subject to relentless attacks and cutbacks.

The Fine Gael/Labour budget for 2013, set out on 5 December 2012, was a prime example of this. It was a combination of cuts and tax hikes that both targeted the vulnerable and hit the average working class person.

The budget cut child benefit by €10 a month for the first two children, €18 a month for the third child and €20 a month for the fourth and subsequent children. The sheer viciousness of this cut needs noting. Child benefit is known to be the most effective benefit for actually helping children. A flat €10 euro cut, like a flat rate tax, obviously hits poorer families much harder than the well off or the rich (who would barely notice it). Moreover, poorer people, not just in Ireland but in almost all societies, tend to have more children, so the extra cut for third and fourth children is an extra attack on the poor. Thus a family with four children lost €696 a year at a stroke – a real body blow to those on low incomes.

Back-to-school allowances were also be cut by up to 33pc per child, with the rate for primary pupils down from €150 to €100 and the rate for secondary pupils down from €250 to €200.

Not surprisingly the group Protest Against Cuts to Child Benefit (PACUB) said children would go cold and hungry as a result of these cuts. Spokesperson Niamh Ui Cheallaigh, said, "It feels like the most savage attack possible on children and families", and the Children's Rights Alliance said. "Each cut on its own is detrimental, but accumulatively these cuts are devastating. In its eagerness to finance a dead banking system, the Government is killing our future". At the same time maternity benefit was made taxable.

Another measure was a cut of 19% or €325 in the annual respite care allowance, making life significantly tougher for a particularly hard pressed group. Then there was the tripling of prescription charges from 50c to €1.50 – not a huge amount unless, of course, you happen to be poor and need a lot of medication – combined with the raising of the cap on medication costs from €120 to €144.a month. Also cancer patients will be charged for chemotherapy treatment before they are treated. Patients will be charged €75 euro to use the services of a day centre which administers chemotherapy.

At the same time dole payments were reduced from 12 months to 9 months, student fees were increased by €250 a year for the next three years bringing them to €3000 by 2015 and PRSI (Pay Related Social Insurance) payments were increased by an average €264 per PAYE worker.

The increases in tax on beer, spirits, wine and cigarettes attracted less attention than cuts to children, education, health etc because working class people are meant to feel guilty about smoking and drinking but again it has to be understood that all these tax hikes have a disproportionate effect on the poor who are also the people most likely to smoke etc because of the stress in their lives.

Even the right wing Economic and Social Research Institute was forced to conclude that in addition to making life much harder for most people the overall impact of the budget was seriously 'regressive', that is it affected those at the bottom of society more than those at the top and widened the gap between them.

But the budget for 2013 is only the latest example of something that has been going on for five years now. In fact it is the sixth austerity budget in that time, all of which have followed the same basic pattern.

The Fianna Fail budget of October 2008 imposed a levy of 1-2% on all incomes and increased taxes on cigarettes, wine, petrol and cars. Then the budget in December 2009 cut social welfare by 4%, child benefit by €16 a month and public sector pay by 5-10%. At the same time the Universal Social Charge of €100 a year was introduced. Brian Lenihan's budget of December 2010 cut child benefit by a further €10 euros, social welfare,

disability allowance and jobseekers allowance by €8, and raised student fees by €500 to €2000.

When Fianna Fail and the Greens were introducing cuts Fine Gael and Labour, and especially Labour, attacked them fiercely. But the change of government in January 2011 did not produce a change of policy. The budget of December 2011 involved €1 billion in new indirect taxes such VAT (which hit the poor hardest, remember) plus massive cuts to community and voluntary groups, by 40-50% in many cases and, of course, the introduction of the hated Household Charge – yet another regressive flat tax .

But even this long list is only a selection of the multitude of cutbacks inflicted on working people in way or another. There have also been hospital closures, ward closures, reductions in health staff, cuts in pay student nurses, cuts in the Home Help service, cuts to DEIS schools, reductions in Special Needs Assistants in schools, cuts in pay for new teachers (€41,000 to €32,000 since 2009) and rent increases.

The humorously named Department of Justice and Equality has cut its budget for Traveller initiatives by 7%, for gender equality by 17%, for services to migrants by 31%, for women's organizations by 35%, for drugs initiatives by 7% and for disability awareness by 72%.

And as they take all this money out of the economy, i.e. out of people's pockets, €30 billion over five years, this reduces people's ability to buy goods in the shops, which in turn leads to less goods being produced and to fewer jobs. The economy spirals downwards and the recession deepens.

In the North, despite the different jurisdiction, the picture is remarkably similar. Between 2008 and 2011 Sinn Fein/ DUP cut £1.7 billion from the public sector. Then in 2011 the Tory/Lib Dem government in Westminster cut the Northern Ireland Block Grant by £4 billion (a cut of over £2000 per head of the population) and Sinn Fein and the DUP both agreed to pass on the cuts despite strikes and marches by tens of thousands of workers on November 30. As in the South this has meant hitting the most vulnerable, like small schools, those with special needs, teaching assistants, people with disabilities and so on.

Meanwhile the rich are actually get richer. Whereas, since 2008, the lower 50% of the population have lost 10% of their income and the poorest tenth have lost 25% of theirs, the richest tenth have increased their income

by nearly 10%. Meanwhile the super rich have done even better. In March 2011 it was reported that the richest 300 people in Ireland, less than 0.01 % of the population, had increased their wealth by €6.7 billion and now hold wealth totaling €57 billion between them.

These statistics of rising inequality translate on the ground into a real growth in hardship, suffering and hopelessness for people and they interact with and intensify the other aspects of Ireland's mess talked about earlier. Austerity and increased poverty pile up the pressure on women dealing with unwanted pregnancy, especially those who don't have the money for a trip to England; so they make the need for free, safe and legal abortion more urgent than ever.

Corrupt politicians who line their own pockets are bad enough at the best of times but in today's economic climate they are a disaster. In the boom 'stroke politics' by which careerist TDs got a little extra for their constituency were distasteful and unprincipled; now, in the era of endless cutbacks, they are really robbing the less advantaged or less well placed of essential services.

So is there any alternative to more and more pain in this ongoing recession?

Chapter 4. What's the alternative?

All the mainstream politicians, supported by most mainstream economists and most of the media, insist there is no alternative to their extreme austerity agenda. Actually this is nonsense. It is perfectly straightforward to outline a whole range of alternative economic measures to address Ireland's economic crisis which would ease the burden on ordinary people instead of intensifying it.

In December 2012, People Before Profit TD, Richard Boyd Barrett, set out an alternative budget with the following main proposals:

1. Cancel the debt. The decision to guarantee all the debts of the six key banks which has already cost the Irish taxpayer €65 billion will lead, by the end of 2013, to a national debt of €197 billion. This is unsustainable and not the people's debt in the first place. It should be cancelled

2. Tax the top earners. Ireland has 108,250 people who between them earn a total of over €20 billion (average €186,885 per person per year). Increase total income tax on this top 5% by €3 billion.

3. Tax the wealthy. Introducing a mere 2% wealth tax on the wealthiest 5% of households would bring in about €3.2 billion a year.

4. Tax the speculators and money dealers. A minimal 0.01% tax on financial transactions (dealing in shares and bonds) - a modest proposal actually supported by the EU but opposed by the Irish government – would net a further €750 million.

5. Tax the big corporations. At the moment giant corporations, like Starbucks, pay almost no tax, not even the 12.5% they are legally supposed to pay. Making the 12.5% corporation tax effective, ie actually collecting it, would raise about €4 billion, and increasing it to 15% (still way below most other countries) would raise another €2 billion.

6. Take full control of the banks. Use this to stop house repossessions and relieve the 160,000 households currently in mort gage distress, thus avoiding a major housing crisis.

7. Stop privatisation of state companies and reclaim our natural resources. It has been estimated that the gas and oil reserves off Ireland's coasts, which were shamefully given away for almost nothing by Fianna Fail and , are worth about €450 billion.

8. Use the billions raised and saved by these measures to invest in a major programme of public works which would create jobs, restore and improve public services and kick start the economy out of recession.

However whenever Richard Boyd Barrett or any other representative of the left such as Joe Higgins, Brid Smith, Paul Murphy or Kieran Allen, puts forward these or similar ideas in the Dail, on TV or in the Council Chamber, they are met with an immediate chorus of interruptions and howls of indignation. 'Impossible!' 'Fantasy economics!' 'The statistics are wrong!, 'The figures don't add up!' and so on.

The aim of all this roaring and shouting, especially about the figures, is to confuse matters and throw dust in the eyes of the public. After all how is the average person at home to know who has the correct figures about the exact wealth of the richest 5%, or how much a tax increase on top earners would actually raise, especially as the wealthy employ legions of accountants to conceal their wealth from the revenue? But this is not the point. If in reality a 2% tax on the wealthiest 5% failed to raise the expected €3 billion, then OK, put it up to 3%. No, the real point is that ALL the government spokespersons and virtually all the mainstream politicians and their allied 'economic experts' are opposed on principle to taxing the rich.

It is a bit like the TV performance of anti-abortion activists from the Iona Institute or Youth Defence. They will present themselves as medical and legal experts who have all the latest research at their finger tips and can quote recent scientific papers and the ins and outs of the constitution at the drop of a hat. But actually it is all beside the point because their real position is based not on research but on religious dogma. They are opposed to abortion rights in all circumstances whether the woman's life or

health is as risk or not, whether she is a victim of rape or incest or not, and it has nothing to do with caring for babies or women but is entirely a matter of their conviction that it is God's law.

The opponents of taxing the rich are not motivated by religion but by things that are just as strong. There are two main reasons why they think making the rich pay for the crisis is completely out of the question:

1. Either they are very rich themselves or they represent parties (such as Fine Gael or Fianna Fail), or institutions, think-tanks and so on who are funded by the very rich eg the ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) which began life in 1960 with a grant of $280.000 from the Ford Foundation and by 2010 was receiving state funding of €12.8 million .

2. They are strongly committed to the economic system of capitalism which by its very nature puts the interests of the rich first.

How capitalism prioritizes the rich is shown by the arguments always used against not paying the bondholders or taxing wealth, profits or the corporations. If 'we' don't pay the bondholders (for what amount to their gambling debts) 'we' won't be able to go back to 'the markets' and borrow money. If we tax wealth the wealthy they will take their money out of the country and there will be even less jobs available. If we ask the corporations to pay even a modest amount of taxes they won't invest in Ireland and that will also cost jobs.

In reality a lot of this is bluff. 15% corporation tax, for example, is still much lower than in most other countries (35% in the USA, over30% in Germany) so they still wouldn't want to leave and it's not that easy for a corporation simply to up sticks and move. But it is the logic of the argument we should note. What the rich and the corporations are really saying is, 'Never mind all that stuff about the country and providing jobs, we're only here for the money – you touch that and we're out of here,' 'We have the wealth and control the production so if you don't play by our rules we'll wreck your economy and inflict as much damage on people as we can'.

But those, like Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Labour Party leaders, who believe in capitalism and accept that the rich should control most production, are going to give in to this blackmail.

So it follows that if we are going to get any of the alternatives put forward above or, indeed, stop any of the numerous attacks set out in the budget or planned for the future, we are going to have to fight. By fighting I don't mean picking up the gun like the Provisionals in the 1970s, I mean mobilizing large masses of people on the streets and in the workplaces, in demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins.

Very much the same applies to the other key aspects of the Irish crisis we have talked about, the dominance of the Catholic Church, the unrepresentative and corrupt nature of the politicians and the sectarian divide in the North. Once again there certainly are alternatives.

There could and should be a complete separation of church and state – this exists in many countries. Traditional Catholics are entitled to their religious beliefs and practices, but they should not be entitled to use the state and the law to impose those beliefs on the rest of us, or to control the education of our children or the running of our hospitals. This should not be the case even if the Church did not have such an appalling record in the matter of the treatment of children – in the circumstances it is truly outrageous.

It would have been perfectly possible to have jailed many of the corrupt politicians and their banker/developer friends – the Egyptians jailed their President, Hosni Mubarak, after all. And it is not beyond the bounds of possibility to devise systems whereby electors can hold politicians who betray their election promises to account – not in four years time when all the damage is done, but in the here and now. The English Chartists, the world's first mass workers' movement in the 1840s, demanded annual elections precisely to achieve this. It would also be quite simple to pay TDs only the average workers' wage so as to deter candidates whose aim is to line their own pockets.

Where the North is concerned the alternative to sectarian division is perhaps harder to see because we are always encouraged to see the situation in terms of the 'two communities', but it is nevertheless real. What is needed is not just 'tolerance' or 'equal respect' for the 'two traditions', which can do no more than paper over the crack, while allowing sectarianism to continue and fester. It is the forging of a new identity (neither Protestant nor Catholic, beyond Orange and Green) based on class interests against the common enemy of British rule and the austerity policies imposed by both the Unionists and Sinn Fein.

But none of these things will happen without massive pressure from below. The cowardly Irish political establishment has always run scared of the bishops and the Catholic Right. Even on the very limited question of legislation for the X-case, granting a right to abortion where a woman's life is at risk, it took thousands on the streets twenty years ago to get just a promise of legislation and more thousands on the streets following the death of Savita Hallopanarvar in 2012, to get the government actually to introduce legislation. Clearly the politicians, or the majority of them, form a cozy club that protects its own, and they are not going to hold themselves to account if they are left to their own devices. While in the North it is only in and through mass resistance to the cuts and other attacks, above all in the workplaces, that the class unity of working people can be created.

Chapter 5. We need a revolution

Some people say that the Irish don't protest – it's something to do with our culture. Others say protest doesn't work because 'they' don't take any notice. Both these arguments developed during a period when the level of protest was low compared to say Greece or Spain, mainly because the trade union leaders were in league with the bosses and the government through social partnership and the Croke Park deal and this held back struggle, but both of them are mistaken

The Irish people and the Irish workers have a great tradition of struggle from 1798 to Larkin, Connolly and Bernadette Devlin. Moreover Irish migrants have played key roles as rebels and fighters in the workers' movement across the world, especially in America, Britain and Australia.

And it is true that the politicians don't simply roll over just because people with a good cause assemble in Parnell Square and march to the Dail but if the protest is strong enough and determined enough to scare the politicians, to make them fear for their seats or, even better for their system, then it certainly does work.

A good example was in October 2008 when Fianna Fail, Brian Lenihan and Mary Harney to be precise, tried to remove medical cards from the over 70s and up to 20,000 furious pensioners converged on Leinster House in protest. On that day even a reluctant Enda Kenny felt obliged to pledge his support 'backed by the Labour Party' - what hypocrites these people are! – and the government was forced to back down.

Another example came in September 2012 when disability campaigners camped out overnight at government buildings and made the government reverse its plan to cut €10 million from home assistants.

Then there were the Vita Cortex workers who, denied their rights when developer Jack Ronan closed them down, occupied the factory for 25 weeks until Ronan made major concessions. Other groups of workers, such as at La Senza and HMV, took similar action and also won their rights.

Indeed pretty much all the rights that working people have gained - not only in Ireland but round the world – from the right to vote through to the

welfare state, have been won through campaigning and struggle.

But there is a problem with these victories, important as they are, and the examples of the medical cards and the disability home assistants illustrate it very well. Forced to retreat on one cut, our rulers simply impose another. If it is too politically risky to cut medical cards for the pensioners cut unemployment benefit instead. If the disability protests cause too much embarrassment, go for home helps or child benefit.

At the end of the day the rich and their politicians do not care which of us foots the bill for the crisis as long as it's not them. And as long as there is a crisis – which is here for the foreseeable future – and they feel their profits are threatened they will carry on behaving this way. The only way to stop them is to take from them the power to run society in their interests and inflict pain on the rest of us.

Unfortunately this can not be done through the Dail (or the Northern Ireland Assembly); it needs a revolution.

It is very useful for genuine representatives of working class people to stand in elections and win seats in the Dail and on councils. Deputies like Richard Boyd Barrett of People Before Profit and Joe Higgins of the Socialist Party and Councilors like Brid Smith, can and do use their positions to attack and expose the politicians and to encourage resistance by the people. And it would have been great if a socialist like Eamonn McCann had been elected in Derry, as he nearly was in 2011, to confront Peter Robinson and Martin McGuiness across the floor of the Assembly. But even if 100 Richard Boyd Barretts and Joe Higgins or 200 Brid Smiths or 60 Eamonn McCanns were elected it would not be enough to break the power of the super rich. This is because the power of the rich and of the ruling class as a whole is not based in parliament but in their control of the main industries, the banks, the state (army, judges, police, top bureaucrats), the media and their links to the rich and powerful internationally.

Faced with a genuinely left wing government the ruling class would use all this power to resist it, undermine it and, if necessary, overthrow it. They would go on investment strike, close down businesses, create a financial crisis, use the courts to rule government measures illegal, and incite the police to refuse to enforce them.

This is what happened when the Chilean people elected a left wing government, led by the socialist Salvador Allende, in 1970. Within three years the Chilean military, aided by the Chilean rich and the CIA, overthrew this

government in a coup, murdered Allende and 30,000 Chileans and established a military dictatorship under the infamous General Pinochet.

The Irish ruling class supported by the rich in Britain, the US and elsewhere would try to do the same here. They would not simply step down and let their wealth and privileges be gradually taken away. Therefore, whether there were lots of socialist TDs or not, it would still need a revolutionary struggle to end the rule of the rich.

A revolution in Ireland today – a real people's revolution- does not mean a few hundred armed men and women seizing the GPO like in 1916, heroic as that was. Nor is it a matter of a long armed struggle in the mountains like Che Guevara in Cuba. What it means is a mass movement of working people and their allies (the students, the pensioners, the unemployed and so on), all together, in their hundreds of thousands on the streets and in the workplaces and the communities which overwhelms the power of the government and the gardai and seizes control of the banks, major companies and workplaces and other centres of power and communication. Crucially it would also mean working people setting up a new government of their own that would really represent their interests.

Is revolution right and is it possible?

Conventional wisdom, which we all inherit from our education, the church and the media, tells us that revolution is both wrong and impossible.

It is wrong, conventional wisdom says, because it goes against the legally and democratically elected government of the day. But actually, as recent experience in Ireland shows all too clearly, the present government and political system is not really democratic at all. The wealth and power of the rich enables them both to exert a massive influence on elections and to bend the elected government to their will. They also control the law. In contrast revolution by the people would be an immensely democratic act, enabling ordinary people to take control of society for the first time.

But is it possible? Surely, revolution will never happen. Actually revolution is very possible and history shows that revolutions happen, not everyday, but sufficiently often to make it a very realistic prospect. The number of revolutions that have occurred is often not realized because they tend to get written out of history (especially if they are eventually de-

feated) or get called something else (like a war or civil war).

Here are some examples: the English Revolution of 1642-51 (often known as the English Civil War) the American Revolution of 1775-83, the French Revolution of 1789-94, the French Revolution of 1830, the trans-European revolutions of 1848 in France, Germany, Poland, Italy, Austria and Hungary, the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the German Revolution of 1919 (which overthrew the Kaiser), the Spanish Revolution of 1936 (which became the Spanish Civil War), the Chinese Revolution of 1947, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 (against Stalinist rule), the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Portuguese Revolution of 1974 (which ended 40 years of fascist dictatorship), the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the Rumanian Revolution of 1989 (against the dictator Ceausescu).

Moreover, in 2011 there were two very important revolutions. In Tunisia, the dictator of 23 years, Zinedine Ben Ali, was overthrown in just 21 days of mass resistance, and in Egypt, Hosni Mubarak who had ruled for 30 years, was downed in 18 days of extraordinary mass mobilization. The significance of these revolutions is sometimes underestimated because they 'only' removed dictators and didn't fundamentally change society – the capitalists still rule in Tunisia and Egypt – and this problem is one that lies ahead for the Tunisian and Egyptian people. Nevertheless they showed what is possible. Approximately 15 million people took to the streets across Egypt in those 18 days and they defeated one of the most powerful police states in the region.

Our power

Of course revolutions only happen in 'exceptional' circumstances, but we are living in exceptional times – the most severe economic crisis since the 1930s and a sustained onslaught on the living standards and conditions of the mass of people, also unprecedented since the thirties. In this situation revolution is not only possible but, more and more, the only way of securing any sort of decent future for ourselves and our children.

And we have the power to do it. Remember, without the labour and co-operation of working people – that is without OUR labour – nothing in this society moves. Without us no train, bus or LUAS runs; no plane takes off, no airport functions; no imports or exports pass through our ports;

no lorries move goods around the country; no factories produce products and no supermarkets or call centres sell them. Tony O'Reilly and Denis O'Brien own most of our newspapers but without journalists and print workers no paper is written or produced. No school runs without teachers, cleaners and caretakers; no hospital without nurses, porters, cleaners, receptionists.

And so on for almost everything including the capitalist state itself: government departments and ministries need office workers and cleaners; even An Garda Siochana, whose main function and purpose is to defend private property – if need be by force – depends on the labour of ordinary people to do this.

This gives us enormous potential power. If we use even a significant proportion of it we can make a revolution in Ireland.

Chapter 6. A different society

If the ordinary people of Ireland sweep away the bankers, developers and politicians who have brought this country to its knees and take power into our own hands who will we put in their place and what kind of society should we establish?

It would make no sense to hand the banks and major firms over to new private capitalist owners as this would just restart the same cycle of inequality and exploitation that had just been broken. Even if the new rich and the new bosses started off behaving better than the Seanie Fitz-Patricks, Jonny Ronans and Denis O'Briens we can be sure their good behaviour wouldn't last and that they would use their wealth and economic power to undermine the new people's democracy that had been won by the revolution.

On the other hand banks, financial institutions, modern firms, transport and communications systems cannot be divided between individual workers in the way a feudal aristocrat's vast estate could be divided up among peasants. You cannot parcel out the LUAS or Iarnrod Earann among individual drivers, or divide up the ownership of Bank of Ireland between 4 million citizens or even 40,000 depositors. The only way for the people to retain any control of these and similar institutions would be to take them into public ownership and make them the collective property of the state.

But this raises another problem. We know from the experience of Russia and Eastern Europe, as well as various nationalized industries in Britain and elsewhere, that state ownership in itself is no guarantee of either fairness and equality or even honesty and efficiency. In so-called 'communist' Russia the vast bulk of industry was state owned but the state officials that ran it were just as much a corrupt elite and just as exploitative of ordinary people as western bosses. Therefore it will be necessary to ensure that both the state owned industries and institutions and the state itself are democratically controlled.

Three things are needed for this. First, there needs to be democracy at work, with the regular election and accountability of all management committees. At the moment nothing like this exists in capitalist companies or industries so the idea may seem strange but if the people of Ireland can elect TDs and their President, and the people of the USA can elect their Congress and President, workers can elect managers.

Second, the government, political representatives and state officials need to be elected and recallable by the people who elect them, not once every four years but all the time. For this to happen they have to be elected by and accountable to actual collectives or assemblies of working people who meet regularly, not just voted in once every four years by atomized voters who never meet or discuss.

Third, all these elected managers and representatives in industry and the state have to receive no more than the average industrial wage so that they remain in touch with the people they are serving and don't become a new privileged elite, like the bureaucrats in Russia did.

All these things will be very possible to establish because the revolutionary mobilization of the people will have already paved the way for them. In the process of making the revolution ordinary people will have had to make a start at taking over the running of society. They will have held mass demonstrations with democratic public assemblies like those organized by the Indignados in Spain and the Occupy movement in America in 2011. They will have organized mass strikes and general strikes with elected strike committees from different workplaces and got used to getting rid of corrupt or privileged union officials. They will have occupied many of their workplaces and in many cases started to run them. They will have organized their communities, like in Free Derry and the Battle of the Bogside in 1969 but on a much larger scale.

This combination of social or collective ownership and democratic control will be something new. It doesn't exist in any society in the world today. But both elements are essential. Without social ownership the rich capitalists can always subvert and manipulate any parliament. Without genuine democracy at work and in the state, state ownership just becomes state capitalism.

It is also the essence of socialism. It is what the socialist movement aspired to when it began early in the 19th century. It is what Marx and Engels meant by socialism (and communism) when they called on the proletariat (working people) to overthrow the bourgeoisie and take over the

running of society, saying 'the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself'.

It was what the Russian Revolution meant by socialism in its first phase before the rise of Stalin. The slogan of the Revolution was 'All Power to the Soviets' and they called their society the Soviet Union, but 'soviet' was just the Russian word for 'council' and the early soviets were precisely the kind of democratic assemblies we are talking about.

It is what James Connolly meant by socialism. He wrote, 'Socialism properly implies above all things the co-operative control by the workers of the machinery of production; without this co-operative control the public ownership by the State is not Socialism – it is only State capitalism' *

And it is what the Socialist Workers Party means by socialism today.

Socialism, equality and freedom

A socialist society would be an enormously fairer, more equal society than we have at present and it would offer a much better life for the large majority of people.

Socialism would not create perfect equality overnight but it would drastically reduce the extremes of inequality that we have under capitalism. The biggest inequality we have in today's society, both in Ireland and the world, doesn't come from some people being paid more than other people, or some people working harder than others or being cleverer than others; it comes from a very few people being able to make vast sums by exploiting the labour of others.

Michael O'Leary, estimated wealth €434 million, did not acquire that fortune by working 434 times as hard as your average millionaire and 434,000 times as hard as one his air stewards who only has €1000 in the bank, if that. He made his money by getting thousands of Ryanair workers to work for him and paying them less, every hour of every day, than the value of the goods and services they produce in that hour and in that day.

A financier like Desmond Dermot, wealth €1.35 billion, seems to make his money just by manipulating money and doing 'clever' deals. But in reality all the shares he trades, the bets he handles, the profits he makes on buying and selling companies and all the wealth he manipulates and 'grows', has its basic source in the labour of working people.

* James Connolly, 'State Monopoly versus Socialism', Workers' Republic, 1899.

Socialism, with public ownership of banks and main industries, will cut out this kind of inequality immediately. At the same time it would make it possible to decide democratically how much we want, as a society, to pay people. Do we really want to pay top footballers hundreds of times as much as teachers or consultants ten times as much as nurses?

Socialism will make society much more equal in many other ways. It will provide free and equal education and health services for all and cut out inheritance of great wealth so that our children get an equal start in life. It will work seriously to eliminate all racial, national, religious and gender inequality.- this is vital not just as a matter of principle but also because the new society would not survive if allowed itself to divided on any of these lines.

Socialism will create a better life for people because it will produce for human need rather than for profit. Capitalism devotes huge resources of human labour and energy to activities that are useless or positively harmful. Advertising is an obvious example. Advertising is everywhere in our society but most of it serves no purpose other trying to make a profit by persuading us to buy one brand of beer, soap powder or car instead of another or to buy things we either don't need or damage us such as cigarettes.

Capitalism wastes human resources on a vast scale by making large numbers of people unemployed. When we say, 'there are no jobs', it doesn't mean there are no tasks that need performing – the world is overflowing with tasks that need to be done - it means that business is not finding it profitable to employ people at the moment. Production for need not profit would make it possible to eliminate unemployment.

At present if there is a choice between building a casino, a luxury hotel and a hospital, the casino or the hotel are likely to win out over the hospital not because they are what society needs but because they are profitable. Simply by shifting the priority from profit to people socialism would improve people's lives dramatically.

With proper use of existing wealth and resources there would be no need for any child in this society to grow up in poverty or any pensioner to struggle to heat their home. Instead of having some people working 60 or more hours a week and others not working at all the work could be shared out rationally so that every one works, say 30 hours a week and no more.

The introduction of democracy at work will change not only what gets

produced but the nature of work itself, helping it to become a creative and fulfilling activity rather than boring drudgery as so much of it is at present. This will greatly enrich people's lives. And for working people whose choices in life are often severely limited by poverty, socialism will bring a big increase in their real freedom of choice.

Chapter 7. Would socialism work?

'That all sounds very good in theory but it would never work in practice!' Just as conventional wisdom says that revolution from below will never happen, so it also tells us that socialism couldn't possibly work, except perhaps as a police state.

In this chapter I want first to examine three of the most commonly expressed arguments against the possibility of a society of equality, democracy and freedom.

There would be no incentive

'Without profits to be made and high salaries to be earned there would no incentive for anyone to work hard or innovate.'

First let's note that the rule in Ireland at the moment, and pretty much everywhere else, seems to be that if you are rich already you need to be given huge incentives to get you to work at all but if you are poor, unemployed or on social welfare the 'incentive' you are given is not higher wages but a benefit cut.

However, to answer the objection directly, it is not true that there would no incentive to work in a socialist society. On the contrary the vast majority would have more incentive to work than they do under capitalism because their work would directly benefit themselves, their families and their communities instead of first enriching the bosses (with the rest of us left hoping for some crumbs from the rich man's table).

When people can see a real connection between the work they do and improving their lives through better schools and colleges, better medical services, better housing, an improved environment, more facilities for young people, shorter working hours and so on, there will not be a problem getting people to work.

Besides, despite the myths spread by the likes of Joan Burton, people hate being unemployed and not just because of the lack of money, but because it leaves them feeling isolated, useless and unvalued by society. Even under this system most people want to make a contribution to society and socialism would greatly increase their opportunity to do so. It would also,

as it developed, steadily widen the range of work that would be creative, interesting and rewarding in itself.

The question of innovation is a red herring. Capitalists, usually calling themselves 'entrepreneurs', like to present themselves as innovators. In fact most of the really important innovations and discoveries come from scientists and, in the modern world, are a collective process, involving large teams of researchers. What the big corporations and governments do is fund, direct and exploit these innovations for their own purposes.

This fundamentally distorts the process. Far more resources are put into research for military purposes, ie how to kill people more effectively, than in to saving or improving people's lives so we have intercontinental missiles capable of blowing up the whole world but still no cure for AIDs. Moreover many of the corporations deliberately hold back or suppress innovations, new drugs etc, if they fear they will undermine their sales and profits.

Socialism, therefore, would have no problem organizing the collective endeavours of scientists and others to produce new ideas and inventions – indeed it would do this on a bigger scale than the present system – and also ensuring that this research and innovation really served people's needs.

What about human nature?

The argument about incentives is one part of a wider argument about human nature which is, and always has been, the main argument put forward against socialism. It runs roughly as follows.

Human nature is basically selfish and greedy and therefore only a system based on greed – namely capitalism- will work effectively. Socialism and equality, being contrary to human nature, would have to be imposed on people by dictatorship and a police state, which would be even worse than what we've got now. Besides there are always ambitious and power hungry people who will always rise to the top so any attempt to change the system will only produce a new set of rulers who will be just as bad or worse than the present lot.

This view of human nature as fundamentally bad has been preached by the church for nearly 2000 years (as the doctrine of original sin) so it is not surprising that it's often regarded as just common sense. But it is not

true. People, ie babies are not born sinful or greedy or ambitious, nor are they born virtuous, unselfish and 'naturally' socialist. In fact they are born with, and develop, the capacity to be all these things.

If we think of the people we know and look at the behaviour we actually see around us we find that the overwhelming majority of people are neither all bad nor all good but a complicated mixture of selfishness in some respects and generosity in others, of courage in some aspects of their life and cowardice in others and so on. Some people are physically brave but morally weak, with others it is the reverse. One person will be generous in giving to charity but mean with their family; another will be kindly at home but a bullying boss or manager at work.

Even the very best people usually have some flaws and even the worst often have some redeeming features. A lot depends on how we are conditioned as children, by society as well as by our parents, and even more depends on the social circumstances and situations we are in. People who never dream of killing a fellow human being in ordinary circumstances become killers when they find themselves in army uniform and ordered to kill. A teenage tearaway grows up and becomes a responsible parent. A militant trade unionist turns into a moderate or even a sell-out when they leave the shop floor and become a union official. Someone else doesn't get radical until they are middle aged.

The point is wouldn't it be better to have a social system which encouraged solidarity and cooperation as socialism would, rather than encouraging greed and individual self interest as capitalism does?

And, yes, there may well be ambitious and power hungry individuals who want to take advantage of the revolution and the new situation for their own ends but it is perfectly possible to put in place mechanisms to prevent this happening. In fact we have already given some idea what these should be: regular democratic assemblies to hold all officials and elected representatives accountable to the people and a strict maximum wage for all officials and representatives so that they can't become a privileged elite. This depends on having people actively engaged in their communities and workplaces, not just sitting at home watching TV, but that is exactly what the whole process of revolution will create.

But doesn't history show that revolutions always go wrong? That's certainly the impression we are often given but it is not what history shows at all. The Dutch Revolt of the sixteenth century (which was the first signif-

icant revolution of the last 500 years) freed the Dutch from the tyranny of the Habsburg Empire based in Madrid and created a very successful and progressive Dutch Republic. The English Revolution of 1642 ended the absolute monarchy of Charles I and brought about parliamentary rule and made England into the most economically advanced country in the world in the next hundred years.* The American Revolution of 1775 freed America from British rule and launched America on course to both a parliamentary democracy and the world's biggest power. The French Revolution of 1789 sounded the death knell of absolute monarchy and spread modern ideas of democracy and freedom internationally**

But these were **middle class** revolutions, led by the middle classes, with artisans and peasants as supporters, with the aim of getting rid of the old feudal aristocrats so that the middle class could become the new ruling class and develop capitalism. In this they were generally very successful.

But what about the Russian Revolution, wasn't that supposed to be socialist? Yes it was and I'll deal with this next. First however it needs to be said that actually there is clear historical proof that there is nothing in human nature that prevents us living together as equals- it's just that this history gets much less attention in school or in the media than the history of kings, queens and tyrants.

Human beings as tool making animals distinct from apes have been around for more than two and a half million years, and in our current physical form, the same as contemporary humans, for about 100,000 years. But the division into rich and poor, rulers and ruled, only even started to emerge with the development of agriculture between 10,000 and 5000 years ago.

For the vast bulk of human history people lived as hunters and gatherers without class divisions and without governments or rulers (or police or soldiers) on the basis of sharing and cooperation i.e. a 'primitive' kind of socialism. We know this because although class divided societies started to get the upper hand in places like Iraq and Egypt about 5000 years ago some of the equal societies survived into modern times – for example among the Eskimos, the Australian Aborigines, the Amazon 'Indians',

Of course what Cromwell did in Ireland, where he was a brutal oppressor, is a different story.

*** Conservatives make a lot of the 'reign of terror' when aristocrats were guillotined in 1793 but the bloodletting was short lived and relatively minor (about 3000) compared to that in any number of wars or the suppression of the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland when far more (between 20- 50,000) were killed – it was just different blood that was being spilled.*

and the !Kung San ('Kalahari bushmen'). These peoples obviously lived at a low economic level but they had better lives, and better diets, than many of the poor in the third world today.

So we know an equal society is possible and not incompatible with human nature.

The failure in Russia

The collapse of 'communism' in Russia and Eastern Europe in 1989-1991 was presented in the media as the failure of socialism. Even now it is often quoted as proof that 'socialism is dead' or is a 'failed ideology'.

In reality the system that collapsed in Russia and Eastern Europe, and thoroughly deserved to collapse, was not genuine communism or socialism at all. It lacked what Connolly and Larkin and all the genuine socialists going back to Marx held to be the genuine ingredient of socialism, namely the democratic control of society by working class people. Nor was it a society of equality.

In Russia there had been no democratic control of the government or industry by working people since the 1920s when it was destroyed by Stalin and his new class of privileged bureaucrats.

Stalin and his supporters systematically dismantled the rights the Russian workers had won in the 1917 Revolution and built up a monstrous police state in which anyone who challenged the power of the ruling bureaucracy was likely to find themselves in a slave labour camp in Siberia.

State ownership without democratic control by the workers was, as Connolly said, not socialism but state capitalism. It was this state capitalism that was imposed on the countries of Eastern Europe when they were taken over by the Red Army in the process of defeating Hitler.

It was against this imposed state capitalism that the Hungarian working class rose up in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 only to be crushed by Russian tanks, that the Czech people rebelled in 1968 only to be crushed by Russian intervention, and that the Polish workers created the mass trade union, Solidarnosc ('solidarity') in 1981 to be suppressed by a Russian backed military coup.

And it was this state capitalism **not** socialism that failed in 1989.

However, the Russian Revolution did not begin that way. It began as a real workers' revolution from below that first overthrew the Tsars, who

had ruled Russia for 500 years, and then, in October 1917, established genuine workers' power through workers' councils ('Soviets'). So how did it go wrong and does the fact that it went wrong prove that socialism won't work?

The Russian Revolution started out with incredible hopes and enthusiasm and achieved some magnificent things in its early days. It gave land to the peasants who had been exploited for centuries. It took Russia out of the dreadful slaughter of the First World War. It established complete legal equality for women before they even got the vote in Britain or Ireland, and homosexuality was legalized in December 1917 (compared to 1967 in Britain and 1993 in Ireland).

But there were huge problems from the outset. Russia in 1917 was still a very backward country economically and socially – the large majority of the population were peasants and urban workers were only a small minority plus the country was devastated by the First World War.

Then, soon after the Revolution, all the Western capitalist powers, especially France and Britain, got to together to finance and arm former Tsarist generals in an effort to smash the Revolution. This plunged Russia into a terrible civil war which inflicted the most extreme damage on the economy and the people.

The Revolution defended itself by means of the Red Army, led by Leon Trotsky, and survived but at a terrible cost. The working class who had made the revolution was virtually destroyed and lost the ability to democratically control the society.

There was really only one way out of this situation and that was to spread the revolution to other countries. This was what Lenin, Trotsky and the original leaders of the Revolution tried to do by forming the Communist International. They knew, and said openly, that it would be impossible to complete the building of socialism in Russia alone.

They were right and when the revolution failed to spread to Italy, Germany and so on (though it very nearly did) and Lenin died, Stalin and a layer of bureaucrats he collected round him were able to take over the leadership of the Soviet Union. They drove out Trotsky, abandoned the goal of international revolution, and opted for 'socialism in one country'. In practice this turned into state capitalism in one country and a police state.

The key point here is that the failure of the Russian Revolution to fulfill its promise was not due to the unworkability of socialism but to the impossibility of sustaining socialism in one isolated country. This is very relevant to Ireland because although we could make a start on creating socialism here it would not be possible for it to survive indefinitely in Ireland alone.

We will explore this issue further in the next chapter.

Chapter 8. A world to win

The biggest problems facing any attempt to create a socialist society in Ireland would be resistance from the rich who would want to regain their lost power and privileges and opposition from the rich and the ruling classes in the rest of the capitalist world.

These problems are closely connected. There is no doubt the Irish rich would do what they could to sabotage the new society. No ruling class in history has ever departed the scene willingly or graciously, but by themselves they would not be able to do much. The really rich are a very small minority in society, no more than 1 or 2%, and once they had lost their hold on state power – the politicians, officials, judges, gardai etc. who protect them – they would easily be dealt with by the Irish people if they stood alone.

Unfortunately they do not stand alone. The Irish rich are connected by thousands of ties to the much more powerful force of the rich internationally. Take for example, Tony O'Reilly. He is the former CEO of Heinz, is married to a Greek shipping heiress and horse breeder, lives mainly in the Bahamas and was knighted by the British Queen.

Or there is billionaire investor, Dermot Desmond. He splits his time between Dublin, Gibraltar and Barbados, owns Celtic FC and the luxury Sandy Lane Hotel in Barbados (with John Magnier and J P Macmanus), made much of his fortune by buying and selling London City Airport and is part owner of a Latvian bank and a Toronto mining company.

The Moriarty Tribunal into corruption found that when Desmond gave Charlie Haughey £100,000 in 1994 (Haughey said he was experiencing 'a shortage of funds').the payments were made via the Swiss bank account of a company called Anesia Etablissement, Banque Scandinave en Suisse, Case Postale 901, 1211 Geneva 3, of which Desmond was the beneficial owner, via an account at Henry Ansbacher & Company to an account at Cayman International Bank Trust Company, held for Haughey's benefit.

These examples can be repeated indefinitely because in today's world all the super-rich operate internationally. Ireland's three richest registered citizens are Indian industrial magnate Pallonji Mistry (€4.4 billion) who

also owns Jaguar and Rover, the Texas based billionaire John P Grayken(€3.9 billion) who owns property assets in Germany and a stake in a South Korean bank, and Hilary Weston (€3.67 billion) who is married to Canadian retail tycoon Galen Weston – between them they own Canada's biggest grocery chain along with Selfridges in the UK and Brown Thomas in Dublin.

Not only would the international rich have a direct interest in aiding their Irish friends but also the system as a whole would want to prevent any viable alternative to international capitalism developing. Consequently they would put any emerging socialist society under immense economic, political and even military pressure.

They could subject Ireland to economic blockade like Israel does to Gaza or the US did to Cuba, while providing vast funds to Irish reactionaries and counterrevolutionaries the way the US funded the Contras in Nicaragua..

Here we have to be brutally honest. Just as workers in one factory or industry can go on strike or even occupy their workplace, as the Vita Cortex workers did for five months, so Irish working people could hold out for a period against international capitalism. But they could not hold out indefinitely or permanently and under conditions of siege there would be a limit to how much progress could be made towards a fully free and equal society.

However there would be a way of overcoming this problem, as there could have been for Russia in the 1920s, and that would be to spread the revolution to other countries in alliance with the working classes of those countries. Would this be possible?

Spreading the Revolution

There are a number of reasons why spreading the revolution to a number of other countries – Spain, Greece, Britain or indeed Egypt, South Africa or China - in a chain reaction would be very possible.

The first is simply that the rest of the world needs revolution just as much as we do. The inequality on a world scale is even more extreme than it is in Ireland.

On the one hand the 100 richest people on the planet got even richer in 2012, adding $241 billion to their collective wealth (according to the

Bloomberg Billionaires Index) bringing their aggregate net wealth to $1.9 trillion- that's $1,900,000,000,000!! This compares to the total African GDP (the sum of everything produced in the continent) of $1.8 trillion. Africa has a population of 1,000 million!

On the other hand it is estimated that 870 million people, more than the combined population of USA and Europe, actually live in hunger and about 1.4 billion live on less than $2 a day.

The economic crash that brought Ireland to its knees in 2008 was also global in nature, like the Great Depression of the 1930s. Like the Great Depression, which started with the Wall St Crash, this crisis first broke out in the USA: a property bubble went bust and turned into a banking crisis much as it did in Ireland. Now almost all countries are affected.

As a consequence unemployment in the Eurozone stands at 11.8% with the number of jobless reaching 18.8 million (the highest figure since the Eurozone began). Greece and Spain lead the field at over 26% unemployment each.

Ireland's problems of political corruption, lack of real democracy, reactionary religious hierarchies, sexism and sectarian conflict are all global as well. In Spain the cry 'They don't represent us' echoed from hundreds of its city squares in 2011. The so-called 'pro-life' Catholic bigots in Ireland are receiving massive funds from the anti-abortion bigots in the US. The Catholic Church abused Irish children and covered it up, but it did the same in Canada, the US and many other countries and so too did the British establishment; look at the Savile case and the BBC.

At the same time racism and fascism are growing, with the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn becoming ever more menacing in Greece, along with the openly Hitlerite Jobbik Party in Hungary, the National Front in France and many other examples.

Alongside of all this the problem of climate change accelerates rapidly. The world is warming even faster than the scientists expected. The arctic ice is melting at an alarming rate with an ice-free Artic Ocean in the summer months only a decade or so away. In 2012 America had its hottest year on record.and Australia is experiencing an unprecedented heatwave as these words are being written. Temperatures have been so high the Australian Bureau of Meteorology has increased its temperature scale to 54 degrees, and added a new colour code to its temperature maps.

What climate change means is not 'the end of the world ' in 50 years

time as it is sometimes caricatured but steadily increasing extreme weather events and disasters such as fires, droughts, storms and floods which will have more and more devastating effects on people especially the poor.

And this is a truly global crisis which cannot be solved in Ireland or any other single country but which requires an international shift from dependence on fossil fuels which produce carbon emissions (oil, gas and coal) to renewable power sources such as wind power, solar power and tidal power. This can be done but only if we stop producing for profit and start planning production for human need.

But if the crisis is international so to is the struggle against it. In fact if we look at the history of popular resistance and revolution we have that it develops through international waves.

The famous revolts in Irish history have been parts of international tides of struggle. The uprising of the United Irishmen in 1798 was part of the wave of revolution that followed the French Revolution of 1789. The 1913 Dublin Lockout was linked to the period of international industrial struggle known as 'the Great Unrest' in Britain, which also included the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) in America – both Connolly and Larkin had links with the IWW. The Easter Rising of 1916 and the Irish War of Independence were both part of the revolutionary wave growing out of the First World War whose high point was the Russian Revolution of 1917 and which swept Europe in 1919.

This even applies to the start of the Civil Rights Movement and 'the Troubles' in the North in 1968. It was very much a product of the general student, youth and civil rights revolt of the 1960s.

The last two years have also seen an international tide of revolt including the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions and the rest of the Arab Spring, the Indignados movement in Spain, the general strikes and street resistance in Greece, the Occupy movement in America and the Southern European General Strike against austerity on 14 November, 2012, and much else besides.

Thus any revolution in Ireland would be sure to meet with a massive response from the working people of many other countries. Moreover we now live in a world where global integration, travel and communications are far more developed than in the past. Just as it was possible to watch the epic battles of the Egyptian Revolution around Tahrir Square, live on

TV, so news of mass rebellion in Ireland would spread round the globe in hours and days and a revolutionary government would be able to send its message to workers everywhere as never before.

Finally there is the crucial fact that the international working class, the main force for socialist change has grown immensely. The media is always telling us that class is less important these days and that the working class is disappearing. This is not true even in Ireland or Britain, once we understand that most white collar workers are working class, but on a global scale it is the opposite of the truth. Rather in China, India, Brazil, Egypt, Korea, Indonesia and many other countries that used to be mainly peasant countries there has been a vast expansion of the working class and, concentrated in great cities, these workers have immense revolutionary potential as the great revolt against Mubarak in Cairo showed.

All these factors make it very reasonable to expect that a revolution and socialist change in Ireland, or anywhere else, would spread rapidly to other countries.

A Socialist World

If working people took power into their own hands in several major countries – say Ireland, France and Greece - it would create a massive momentum for change. If socialism then triumphed in the world's key economies – USA, China, Japan, Germany – the rest would follow suit without much trouble and we would have a socialist world.

A socialist world would be a new beginning for humanity. It would generate immense possibilities for the human race which we can only speculate about.

But some things are clear: no child would go hungry, poverty would be abolished, the causes of war would be eliminated, and the exploitation of the many by the few and all the immense inequality it produces would end. Mankind would be able, for the first time in history, to control – collectively, democratically and rationally – its production and its future.

The alternative if we leave our world in the hands of the rich is also clear – increasing inequality, hardship and barbaric destruction for us, our children and our grand children.

Chapter 9: Get involved! Get organized!

As we have said, we, the ordinary people, are going to have to take mass action to defend ourselves against government attacks and to force them into any sort of alternative policies.

This is even more the case with the struggle for socialism. Real socialism won't be, and cannot be handed down to us from above by politicians, leaders or anyone else. We have to win it for ourselves. This means getting involved in the struggle.

However, it is also not the case that Irish working people will all wake up one day and say, 'That's it we a need revolution, we need socialism!' Rather, the struggle for socialism and socialist thinking among the mass of people will develop out of the struggle against government attacks and austerity, and campaigns on all sorts of local and national issues.

Therefore everyone who wants to see a better, fairer more equal Ireland and a better world should get involved in the battles and campaigns of working people going on around them; like, for example, the campaigns against the household charge and the property tax, or for a woman's right to choose or to stop the cuts in child benefit or to defend education or stop the sell off of our natural resources.

Another way to get involved is through the trade unions. Trade unions are not very popular with many working class people in Ireland at the moment. This is because the main leaders of the unions are in the Labour Party and have failed to lead any serious resistance to Fine Gael/Labour cuts or, in many cases, to defend their own members against the bosses.

Nevertheless, trade unions are mass organizations of working class people which link people together in their workplaces and by their occupations or industry. This means they have a very important role to play in mobilizing the working class. People who want change should be involved in their unions and work to reclaim them from leaders who sell out.

But, as well as campaigns and trade unionism we also need political organization. This is not just to contest elections, useful and important as that is, but to be the element that draws together all the different struggles in a coherent strategy.

Our rulers – the rich and the government together – plan and strategise

and they have a worked out view of the world, in which the bottom line is profit, on which to base their plans. Our side also needs to plan and strategize and we too need a worked out view of the world which puts people first. We need a political party.

This doesn't mean a party like Fianna Fail, Fine Gael or Labour, run from the top by professional politicians and rich donors or by well heeled trade union leaders. It means a genuinely democratic organization rooted in working class communities and working people's struggles.

It means a party which takes an active part in the day to day campaigns and, at the same time, puts the case for socialism and for revolution within the movement.

This is what we in the Socialist Workers Party are working to build. We work alongside and with everyone who wants to resist and as part of the People Before Profit Alliance and the United Left Alliance. We are involved in many grassroots campaigns across the country and in trade unions and student unions.

Movements and struggles we have participated in include the movement against the Iraq War in 2003, the campaign against the bin tax, campaigns against racism, for a woman's right to choose, against cuts to SNAs, for the Home Help Service, against student fees, and against the Household Tax and the Property Tax.

In the unions we work to mobilize solidarity for strikes and sit ins such as the Vita Cortex occupation and to win the unions back from the right wing leaders and officials who currently dominate them.

Experience has shown that the presence of socialists in campaigns and strikes helps them to struggle and win. It has also shown that when a revolution does break out the existence of a strong revolutionary party can make the difference between the revolution winning and it being defeated.

For all these reasons we ask you if you agree with our basic ideas to join us in the work of building such a party in Ireland.

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For years Ireland has been in a severe crisis. It's not just the economy but also the political system and the wider society that is in a mess and it extends to the north as well.

The responsibility for this lies with the bankers, developers and the rest of the super rich, aided by the politicians who protect them, but ordinary people are being made to pay the price.

However, this pamphlet argues there is an alternative: it for those same ordinary people to resist the attacks they are under and in the process build a movement to challenge the capitalist system that lies at the root of the massive inequality and injustice in Ireland and in the world.

But is such a change possible and would a different society – a socialist society based on democratic social ownership and production for need – be able to work? John Molyneux looks at these problems and concludes it would need a mass revolution but argues this can be done both in Ireland and in other countries. What is more it would mean a much better life for the large majority of people in this country and the world.

He ends with an appeal to people to get involved in the struggle.

JOHN MOLYNEUX is a socialist activist in Dublin, a member of the Socialist Workers Party and the author of a number of books including The Point is To Change It! An Introduction to Marxist Philosophy (2012) and Will the Revolution be Televised? (2011).

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